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MANAGEMENT BASICS #8: DON'T BE ASHAMED TO SAY, “I'M A SALESMAN!”

A COMPANY-WIDE APPROACH TO MARKETING AND SALES SUCCESS

Editor's Note: Following is the eighth part of our ten part series called “Management Basics,” by Fred Ode, CEO, chairman and founder of Foundation Software. See the first seven installments on our website, www.constructionbusinessowner.com.

Overexposure to the pushy, fast-talking, don't take no for an answer salesperson tends to leave one with an ambivalent view on sales. Despite this negative stereotype, I am not ashamed to admit that I am a salesman. Since starting my own company more than twenty years ago, I have had to rely on and sharpen my own sales skills and abilities. Fortunately, I have found that the most effective sales techniques are vastly different from the hard-sell approach.

Why is that good news for me? Because as the owner of a company, I play a major role in the sales and mar-

keting process. Like it or not, nearly all my actions and all my business decisions have some effect on my company's sales. But it doesn't stop with me. I have come to understand how everyone in our company—from receptionist to human resource manager—has an underlying sales role and the ability to “sell” our company.

This brings me to topic #8, marketing and sales, in my ongoing series of “Top Ten Management Basics.” Sales is not only an integral part of commercial activity, it is the lifeblood of every company. Without sales, your company does not exist. And without a company-wide approach to

Management Basics— A Ten Part Series

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2. Communication
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8. **Marketing and Sales**
9. Integrity
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sales where every employee understands the importance of selling, revenue growth and long-term success may be unattainable.

Underlying Sales Opportunities

Within the company's day-to-day business interactions, there exists great potential for sales networking. Your non-sales personnel communicate regularly with clients, vendors, suppliers, subcontractors, government officials, banks, insurance companies and others. The way they deal with these people, the correspondence they send and the image they portray reflects your company.

Friendly, supportive and proactive relationships could represent future sales opportunities or referrals. Disagreements and conflicts could dissuade potential clients from ever doing business with your company. Therefore, you must ask yourself, "Are my employees communicating in a way that demonstrates dignity and respect to everyone? Does the image they portray reflect that of our company?"

Outside the sales force, everyone in the company needs to become sales-oriented, at least to the point of recognizing that their words and actions can have a real impact on the company's success or failure.

Attitude Makes the Difference

As a follower of Dale Carnegie's techniques for winning friends and influencing people, I try to emphasize putting my best face forward with every single company contact. That means treating people with dignity and respect, being other-centered and a good listener. Though it may be in the short-term interest of your business to be arrogant and opportunistic, the long-term success of your company will, most likely, hang in the balance.

When conflicts do arise, and you are faced with an unhappy or disagreeable person, the natural response is to fight back and become aggressive. The results are usually not beneficial for either party. However, when you take a step back and try to appreciate where that person is coming from, you can usually "disarm" him or her with kindness. When someone calls to complain, for example, thank them for their call and listen to their remarks. Although your reply may not be what they want, the other person will leave the conversation feeling that they have been treated respectfully and with fairness.

Understanding the Sales Process

Often, the best way to learn how to sell is to learn how to



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buy and negotiate through the buying process. When you look at the sales process from the buyer's perspective, you have a much better understanding of what it takes to improve sales. Think, for example, of what you are looking for when making a major purchase for your company. Do you want to be "sold" on a product or "serviced" by a knowledgeable salesperson? Do you want someone to tell you what you need, or educate you on how a product or service can help achieve your goal at an economical cost? And once you make the purchase, do you wish to be forgotten, or expect the service that you've been promised?

Understanding and initiating good sales techniques, therefore, is essential to the long-term success of every company. Some companies can get by with a sales force that makes empty promises and does anything to bring in new business, or alienates

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old clients in search of new ones. But that can only last so long.

For a company to stand the test of time, each and every employee must understand their role as it relates to sales and business relationships. A business-wide sales and marketing plan that emphasizes dignity and respect rather than hard-sell tactics is a small investment with unlimited revenue-generating potential. So don't be afraid to admit it—we are all in sales! ■

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